



# Ethical Views

December 2012 Vol. 127, No. 4 Newsletter of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

## Sunday Platforms

**Sunday, December 2, 2012, 11:00AM**  
***The Wall for All: Protecting Both State and Religion***  
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia**

Ethical Humanism supports a high wall of separation between the state and religion. As Thomas Jefferson said, this wall is “essential in a free society.” It protects the rights of citizens of religious, atheist, and non-theist perspectives. As zealots try to deconstruct this wall brick by brick, we must speak out more forcefully against those who distort its real purpose: to maintain the secular nature of the state so it better serves believers and non-believers alike.

**Sunday, December 9, 2012, 11:00 AM**  
***Is Genetic Engineering of Food Unethical – Who Decides?***  
**R. Scott Poethig, Patricia M. Williams**  
**Professor of Biology, University of PA**



Humans have been genetically engineering food by a variety of different techniques for over 10,000 years. If this process is inherently unethical, then agricultural societies have two choices: they can either accept the fact that they are inherently unethical, or starve. More to the point, there is considerable confusion about the nature, and the desirability of plants and animals that have been genetically modified by the addition of one or more transgenes. Many people believe that creating such organisms subverts the “laws of nature.” Poethig argues that these organisms are no more, or less, problematic than any other type of

domesticated organism we have created. Decisions about whether or not to allow the cultivation of GM organisms are not ethically neutral if these organisms are the only way to prevent hunger or starvation. Although this is not yet the case, it may soon emerge as an issue in countries that are dependent on crops that can only be improved using transgenic technologies.

A distinguished biologist, Scott Poethig is the 2011 recipient of the prestigious Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. A professor of biology at the University of Pennsylvania since 1983, Poethig, according to the Penn Almanac quoting a former student, “managed to create a syllabus unlike any I had seen before, complete with multiple field trips, scientific papers as well as popular novels for assigned reading, interesting labs which often resulted in homemade treats for students...and a list of projects which catered to those yearning to develop their green thumbs as well as to future investigators of fad diet supplements.” Poethig received a BA from the College of Wooster, 1974, a Master of Philosophy and Ph.D, 1981 from Yale. He has published numerous research studies in the fields of plant biology, cell and developmental biology, genetics, epigenetics, and genomics.

**Sunday, December 16, 2012, 11:00 AM**  
***US Leadership in 2013: Advancing Israel's Peace and Security***  
**Steve Masters, Founding Member of J Street and President of Just Laws**

The 113th Congress will be sworn in following an election season in which Israel played an unprecedented role. Although polling shows that negative campaigning targeted at Jewish voters did not make an impact on the ways Jews voted in the election, building a sound Middle East policy will be high on the agenda of our newly elected leadership.

A two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the only solution which provides a secure and

stable future for both peoples. With a steady rate of settlement construction in the West Bank, a growing movement of non-violence among the Palestinian population, and the Palestinian bid for statehood at the United Nations, the time has never been more urgent to secure Israel's future as the democratic homeland of the Jewish people. Strong United States leadership is essential in brokering a peace deal.

Throughout his career, Masters has been active in Middle East peace issues and has served in many leadership positions within the American Jewish community. In 2007 he was one of the co-founders of J Street and has served on its National Advisory Council since its inception. In 2012 he became chair of J Street's Philadelphia local and one of J Street's inaugural public speaking fellows.

**Sunday, December 23, 2012, 11:00 AM**  
***Winter Solstice Celebration***

We will celebrate the solstice with EHSOP's traditional program open to all. Words of wisdom, music, and the warm glow of candles will help our light shine through the cold winter months. <



### In This Issue

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## Leader's Column



Hugh Taft-Morales

For my column for this month, I asked the newest member of EHSOP, Yuji Miyakawa, to share some of his experiences feeding homeless folk in our city. He is a private person who is not so comfortable speaking up in public, so I am particularly grateful to him for letting me publish his words.

Yuji, a freelance chef who met us through his work with the Food Committee of Occupy, has spoiled many of us here at 1906 Rittenhouse with tasty snacks at coffee hour or special events like Peace Day Philly and Ethics on the Square. As you can read in this column, however, his efforts to help ease the suffering of some chronically hungry men, women, and children is challenging on many levels. I hope his words challenge us, and help us bring out our best in response to the deep need all around us.

### My Homeless Diaries

It was never my original intention to serve homeless people. As a matter of fact, if anything, I avoided homeless people all my life. I shared the same opinion as many people: They are bums. Dregs of society. People with substance issues. Undesirables.

Then came Occupy...and it changed my world a little bit.

The encampment at Dilworth Plaza by City Hall provided a safe space for the city's untold number of homeless people, who flocked to the site and put up their tents, many of which were donated. For the first time in many years they had a place they could call home. Back then I was a one-man committee called Coffee Committee. Every morning I walked around the camp with a pot of coffee, determined to meet every person and to listen

to his/her story. It turned out just about every other person I met fit the definition of homeless.



Photo by Janice R. Moore

Their stories were fascinating. If there are 300 homeless people, there are 300 stories. But many of them were similar. There's an expression that says we are all one paycheck away from being homeless. Well, not exactly, but the gist of the saying rings true. I realized that the majority of these people were just ordinary citizens who had been living ordinary lives until, one day, their livelihood was taken away. They got behind on their rent or mortgage and, inevitably, got evicted.

There is a movie called "Pursuit of Happyness." It's a story about a rather successful businessman who put everything into his business venture that failed. It depicts a gradual and painful process of his and his son's journey into the world of homelessness. See this movie, and when you do, multiply that by 300, and you will understand Occupy Philly of last fall.

What intrigued me most was that they were ALL able to maintain their sense of dignity, even the ones with children. No, make that especially the ones with children. Most of them were educated people perfectly capable of carrying on intelligent conversation and maintaining normal daily activities.

Then came the night of the Occupy Philly eviction from Dilworth, and they became truly homeless again. I know them all, or they know me. I have a nickname: "Hey, Coffee Man!"

If anything, they know how to survive, however hard that might be. But the reality is that once you get on the streets, it is nearly impossible to get back into a home. The rent for even the dingiest apartments goes for around \$500/mo. Then you have to come up with the last month's rent and security deposit. That's \$1,500 you have to raise. That's tough to do, especially if you don't have an address or phone number.

It's a daily struggle. The welfare system fails them miserably. The shelters are not the answer. Offers of food by various organizations are few and far between. One guy described a good day as one when somebody buys him a Big Mac.

One particular incident during the occupation fundamentally changed me. It was a rainy, cold day last November, and the Occupy Food Committee was running behind. The cart that transports the food from the Friends Center to the occupation went missing. We usually fed at 5 p.m., but that day we didn't get the food out until almost 7PM. They waited in lines.

Then the food ran out. I remember the exact moment when I put the last scoop of food onto a dish, and was forced to turn to the rest of them to break the bad news. There was a horrifying collective howl. There were screams. Then some of the children started crying, while the helpless mothers stood by. I was forced to watch the true faces of hunger, and now there were sounds to go with them. That scene is forever etched in my mind.

I did something then I had not done in my entire adult life. I cried.

First the tears came, which I did nothing to hold back. Then I truly started crying, the way people do upon hearing of the death of a close one. It was agony in the most pure and raw

*(Continued next page)*

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essence, and I could NOT stop crying the entire night. I believe I eventually fell asleep, simply exhausted from crying.

My perspective on human suffering was altered that night.

I would like to believe that I've done what I can since. The hunger issue in Philadelphia is real, especially at night because the last feeding of any given day usually occurs around 5 p.m. By midnight people are hungry again. And that's when the real hunger is, simply because there's no food. Seven Eleven tightens security at night, and most homeless people are banned from the stores anyway. Dunkin Donuts actually put padlocks on their garbage cans so that people can't pick them. Even the restaurants won't put out their leftover food simply because they don't want to attract the homeless. Life in the city after midnight is hard if you are homeless.

I have been trying, rather unsuccessfully, to start an initiative that I'm tentatively calling the Midnight Angels Project. I'm hoping to convince some people to do the feeding after midnight. But I know the reality: no one wants to do this. There is not a single organization in the city that provides food for the homeless after midnight. Not one. I'm hoping to change that.

Maybe this small project will help me cope with all the tragic scenes I witness, like when my heart breaks every time I see children after midnight. Their parents want them to sleep so they can watch over them, but the children can't, probably because they slept much of the day and because they are hungry. Hunger and sleep don't go together well. Then I saw a particular incident, twice, that was truly and entirely horrifying. In order to get the kids to sleep, the parents gave them something that helps: alcohol.

The hard stuff. Alcohol on an empty stomach usually knocks them out.

I watched helplessly as the parents forced the children to drink from a bottle. I could only watch because I had run out of sandwiches. I can still hear the cries of the children. Of all things in urban reality this is the one that hit me hardest. It's just part of what I have learned since connecting with Occupy.

-- Yuji Miyakawa



### **"November Women" read at a November (of course) Platform**

**Maggie Cogswell as Darlene and Liz Priestley as Eve revealed hidden pains in their pasts as they confronted each other the day before Thanksgiving in Kate McGrath's "November Women," the award-winning play in the EHSOP One Act Playwriting Contest of 2012, performed Nov 11. A good crowd was on hand for this excellent performance, and an appreciative talk-back session ensued.**

**Congratulations all around!**



Photo by Betsy Lightbourn

Kate McGrath (Back row Left) Willa Jaffe, director (Back row right), and actors Maggie Cogswell (left) and Liz Priestley (right).

## **Three thank-you's from Hugh**

I feel a lot of gratitude working in Ethical Humanism! Here are three reasons:



First, here's a shout out to **Evelyn Hobson**, a friend of our administrator Dotti who volunteers on Thursdays helping us with filing, the newsletter, and typing when Dotti recently broke her wrist. Thanks so much, Evelyn!



Second, thanks also to EHSOP members who brought in blankets, sweatshirts and other supplies so that Sally Redlener's daughter **Ruth Redlener** could distribute them to the victims of super storm Sandy suffering in her Long Beach neighborhood. Ruth wrote to us: "Your members' immediate willingness to extend themselves to donate everything from cash to toiletries to clothing to blankets and more, was wonderful and greatly appreciated by us and by the donation organizers in Long Beach. Additionally, just so you know, donations are expected to be matched by 25% as well, so your generosity had an even greater impact!"



Third, **Bart Worden**, the new Executive Director of the American Ethical Union, is working hard visiting many Ethical Societies (recently visiting us) to encourage movement-wide cooperation and rejuvenation! He shares reflections on his visits movement-wide in his "Executive Blog" on the AEU website. Visit there at <http://aeu.org/> and click on "go there" under "Meet the Societies" on the right hand side. It will help connect you to the larger Ethical Culture community! <>



## ANNOUNCEMENTS



Classical Music and Wall  
Maintenance  
Saturday, December 1,  
7:00PM-9:00PM

EHSOP members! ENJOY great classical music, SUPPORT the wall of separation between church and state, SOCIALIZE with Ed Joyce and other allies in this cause, and PREPARE for Hugh's talk the next day, "The Wall for All!" The \$20 admission supports Delaware Valley Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (DVAU). Tickets may be purchased at the door. Email [info@dvau.org](mailto:info@dvau.org) or visit DVAU's site at [www.dvau.org](http://www.dvau.org) for details.

### Camp Linden Committee Meeting

Sunday, December 2, 9:30 AM

CONSTITUTION SERIES  
Monday, December 3, 7:00PM

*Constitution at Work* examines current social debates in the context of the Constitution, law, and ethics. This time we will focus on "Separation of Church and State." Pennsylvania Law School Professor Kermit Roosevelt will share his expertise in constitutional law. Questions we will explore include: How do the Constitution and lower court rulings explain the separation of religious and civil activity? How do we assure an appropriate separation of church and state while maintaining religious freedom? On Sunday, January 3, at our *Democracy on Trial* companion series we will debate this issue.

## Decorating Tree of Knowledge



**Sunday, December 2**  
(after the Sunday Platform)

Come help decorate the Tree of Knowledge in our lobby! We join our friends from the Freethought Society for this celebration of openness, freedom of conscience, and knowledge.

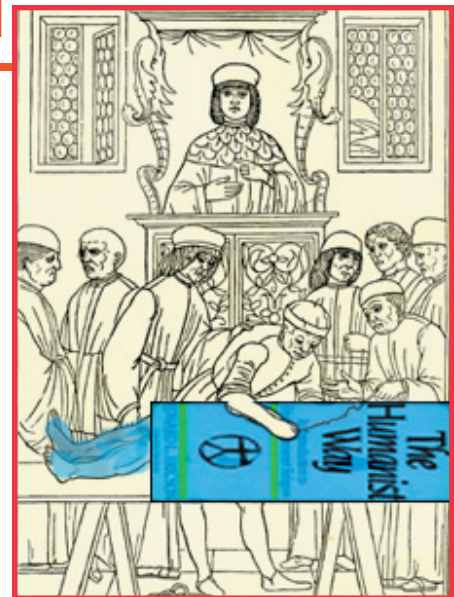
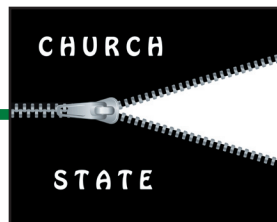
Everyone is welcome!



**Introduction to  
Ethical Humanism**  
Sunday, December 2,  
7:00 PM

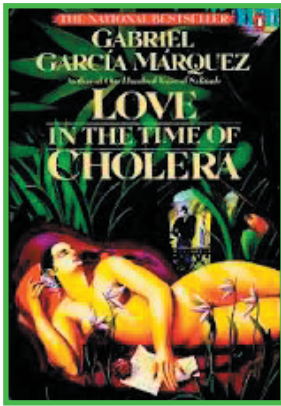
Hosted by Leader Hugh Taft-Morales, this month's focus will be *social justice*. Members and first-time visitors will share questions and reflections. Wine and cheese will be served. Open to the public.

RSVP to  
[leaderhugh@phillyethics.org](mailto:leaderhugh@phillyethics.org).



## Reading Group Concludes With "APPENDECTOMY" Led By Hugh Taft-Morales

Come to the final session of our discussion of Ed Ericson's book, *The Humanist Way: An Introduction to Ethical Humanist Religion*. We will dissect Chapters 8 and 9, the Afterwords and **APPENDIX**.



## A Word to the Worldly Wise Tuesday, December 18, 7:00 PM



The Worldly Wisdom Group will discuss *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez led by Doris Dabrowski. For more information, please contact Terry Martin-Murley, who is in charge of making changes on the slightest pretext.

**Celebrate the end of 2012!**



**Friday December 28**

**8:00 PM - 1:00 AM December 29**

**See below for more information**



## Come for the Solstice, Stay for the Humanlight Sunday, December 23, 1:30 PM



After the Solstice Platform and coffee hour (see note below) comes HUMANLIGHT, a celebration jointly hosted by EHSOP and the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia! I [Hugh] hope many EHSOP members will join me for this.

Tickets are required for a catered luncheon that begins at 1:30 PM in the assembly room, followed by a keynote address by Hugh Taft-Morales, words by HAGP president Martha Knox, music by the musical group *Cantabile*, educational science fun by Wondergy, and some Humanlight ceremonies.

Started in 2001 by the New Jersey Humanist Network, Humanlight offers non-theists a new way to ring in the holiday season. Hugh encourages members of the Ethical Society to attend Humanlight and get to know other area humanists. Together we can celebrate our struggle for, as the Humanlight website puts it, "a future in which all people can identify with each other, behave with the highest moral standards, and work together toward a happy, just and peaceful world." To learn more about Humanlight, go to <http://humanlight.org/>.

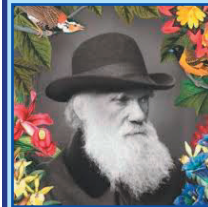
Children 14 and under attend free if accompanied by a paying adult. Their lunch will be a fantastic homemade pizza buffet.

To purchase tickets, EHSOP members please e-mail Hugh and send a check for \$20 each (adult) ticket to Dotti at the office by December 7.

**Space is limited so get your tickets ASAP!**

## SAVE THE DATE!

**Annual Darwin Day Celebration  
Saturday, February 16,  
7:30 PM**



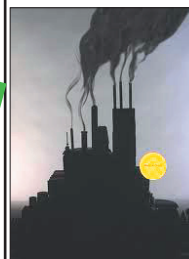
At the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, we are informed by science. So, we'll be celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Charles Darwin. We'll play Evolutionary games as we enjoy snacks and drinks. Dress as your favorite Freethinker!

RSVP to Temma at:  
[temmafish@aol.com](mailto:temmafish@aol.com)  
by February 9.

**Sandwich in a birthday that has a Zero  
Sunday, December 23**

Between the Platform and Humanlight, come upstairs after the platform and help celebrate Bertha Waters' 90<sup>th</sup> B-day!

## Quote-Unquote



"In 1990, carbon emissions were rising at less than 2 parts per million per year. Now they are rising at nearly 3 p.p.m. per year."  
--Dieter Helm, "To Slow Warming, Tax Carbon," NYT, 11/12/12, p. A29

# Reggae Dance Party

*Celebrate the End of 2012*



*A good time will be had by all !*

## Live Music from reggae band **CULTUREAL**

**Friday, December 28, 2012**

From 9:00 PM - 1:00 AM

Refreshments begin at 8PM

at the

**ETHICAL SOCIETY BUILDING**

1906 South Rittenhouse Square

Philadelphia, PA 19103




\$20 for advance purchase. \$25 at the door  
(\$15 for EHSOP members if paid with cash or check by 12/26)  
[www.phillyethics.ticketleap.com/reggae-party](http://www.phillyethics.ticketleap.com/reggae-party)

For more information call (215) 327-4579

All proceeds to benefit Camp Linden



# December 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<b>1</b> 7:00 PM Concert/ Mixer DVAU
<b>*2</b>  <i>See BIG DAY below</i>	<b>3</b> 7:00PM The Con- stitution at Work	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 6:30 p.m. Education Committee 7:45 p.m. Ethical Action Committee	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>*9</b>  11:00 a.m. <i>Genetic Engineering of Food</i> R. Scott Poethig	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> 7:00 p.m. Ethical Read- ing Group 7:00 p.m. <i>Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty Meeting</i>	<b>12</b> 6:30 p.m. Finance Committee	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>*16</b>  1:00 a.m. <i>Advancing Israel's Peace/Security</i> Steve Masters of J Street	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> 7:00 p.m. Worldly Wisdom	<b>19</b> 6:30 p.m. EHSOP Board	<b>20</b>  <b>Amnesty International</b> 7:00 p.m.	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>*23</b> 11:00 a.m. <i>Winter Solstice Celebration</i> 12:15 p.m. Bertha Waters' 90th 1:30 p.m. Humanlight Celebration.	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 8:00 PM Dance Party Reggae Band: <i>Cultureal</i>	<b>29</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>					

\*Child care provided  
during all platforms

## December Birthdays

3: Jack Schwar	14: Anna Gay Freed
5: Josh Bickford	14: Richard Kiniry
7: Bill Coffey	21: Bertha Stovall Waters
10: Ron Coburn	23: Bob Moore

## BIG DAY: December 2

9:30 a.m. - Camp Linden  
Committee

11:00 a.m.  
*A Wall for All*  
Hugh Taft-Morales

12:15pm -Decorate the  
TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

7:00 p.m.  
Intro Ethical Humanism  
Hugh Taft-Morales

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**Ethical Humanist Society  
of Philadelphia**

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

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## SUNDAY SERVICE



**Hosts, Coordinated by  
Nick Sanders**

Dec. 2 - Temma and Arnold  
Fishman

Dec. 9 - Garry O'Rourke and  
Henry Pashkow

Dec. 16- Sharon Wallis and  
Leonard Weeks

Dec. 23 - Sandy and Bill Coffey



**Flowers - Coordinated  
by David Ralston**

Dec. 2 Betsy  
Lightbourn "In  
loving memory of  
Dale H. Drews, my  
co-conspirator."

Dec. 9 Steve Bremner

Dec. 16 George and Iise Sakheim  
"Former NYC Ethical Society  
Leaders Algernon Black and  
Jerome Nathanson who have  
greatly influenced our lives"

Dec. 23 Pat McGeever  
"Remembering Rachel Maloney  
McGeever"



**Coffee Hour, Co-  
ordinated by Ken  
Greiff**

Dec. 2 Group A-E  
Dec. 9 Group F-K  
Dec. 16 Group L-O  
Dec. 23 Group P-Z  
Dec. 30 No Platform

***Ethical Humanist Society  
of Philadelphia***

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